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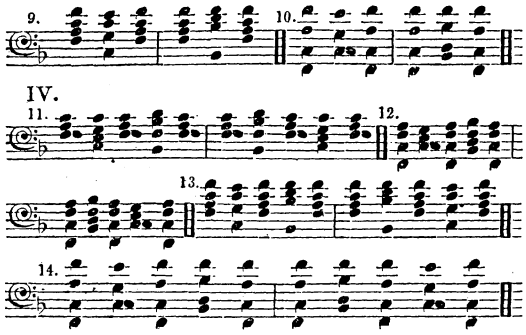

CHAPTER III.

On Peculiar Difficulties of Practising.

We are enabled, by long experience and careful observation, to call the especial attention of male chorus singers and their instructors to the following principal points.

It is well known that inner parts are more difficult to execute, than those placed in the upper or lowest line, and this is especially the case in four-part male choruses,—firstly, because their melody (generally written in close harmony) is less discernible—secondly, because parts written within so small a compass cannot always be given an easily comprehended flow. The choral director must therefore place a good leader at the head of the second tenors and first basses, or exercise and assure these in leisure hours, that the practice of the united members may not be detained by the superior difficulties presented by inner parts. It often happens, in commencing the practice of choral societies, that the weaker voices of the inner parts cannot distinctly intonate their notes, while the upper and lower parts are perfect; in such cases it is necessary to cause the upper or first basses to sing without the tenors above them, who must cease singing until the basses become sure; when this is attained, the second tenors must sing without the first or upper tenors; only when the inner parts are perfect, the four voices ought to be united.

Especial exercises should be practised by second basses, who, as fundamental part, are often required to perform difficult melodious progressions, unavoidable even in the simplest style of concerted music,—for instance, chromatic progressions of several successive semitones, necessary to manifold changes of chords, which are formed and reversed by this means (chords of the 6—2, and others). Such chromatic progressions, even when single—that is, of only two consecutive semitones — are at first somewhat difficult of precise, clear intonation, to low bass voices, which are by nature more fitted to move in distant intervals.

Quick enunciation is more difficult to men than to children, when the former have never sung as boys, or have merely practised *choral* singing. Even when they do not *drag* in the time, they *drag* or swallow consonants; on this account, pieces in lively tempo, or passages of rapid rhythm, should be often practised.

It is almost impossible for strong chest voices (robust basses) to sing piano; therefore, in piano choruses, they predominate over the tenors: to remedy this, powerful bass singers should execute such tones, or succession of tones, with the mouth nearly closed; enunciation will be rendered indistinct by this proceeding, the tone buzzing and dull, articulation uncertain,—but the general effect will be better, and rendered intelligible by the tenors, then not overwhelmed by basses.

When a long note is followed by several rapid ones, the first of these latter is generally lost or indistinctly sung; it is necessary to insure its due importance by a slight additional loudness of sound.

(To be continued.)

THE CRYSTAL PALACE.

The power of Sound.—There is no subject connected with this important performance of greater interest than the effect produced by the power of sound; and no subject which might, perhaps, be converted to more actual utility in the progress of science; and yet but very little has been written about the matter. Here we have 2765 voices and 457 instruments, besides an organ of vast power, all performing together within a space comprising 77,760 square feet. To form any idea of the effect of these multitudinous sounds, the subject should be differently treated at different distances and in different positions. Many very learned discussions have taken place since the first projection of the Handel Festival; and various theories and statements have been hazarded, many of which have been partially or completely refuted by experience, or by an intimate acquaintance with the acknowledged principles of acoustics.

It was supposed by some that the noise produced by so large an orchestra would be perfectly deafening; and it is no doubt a fact that many persons abstained from attending the performance of 1857 from a belief that the effect would be altogether overpowering. Nothing could be more fallacious than this notion, as the result proved. Upon the last grand occasion, the accounts from all quarters varied so much, that it was difficult to reconcile their incongruity: some said that the performance was in every respect perfect—that the sound, without being deafening, produced an effect in accordance with all their ideas of grandeur, precision, and perfection: others, again, asserted that it was altogether a failure—that the sound was by no means adequate to the extent of the building—that it was impossible to hear either solos or choruses with anything like precision—and that what was heard sounded dimly and obscurely, as if proceeding from an orchestra in another building, or in the open air. Now, the fact is, that all these statements have a foundation in truth, and all may be reconciled with the facts as they took place; the simple explanation is, that the music produced an entirely different effect according to the distance and position at which it was heard. Those who were too near the orchestra necessarily heard but a portion of the voices, and not all, consequently they heard only a portion of the harmony instead of the united sounds that would have caused an agreeable effect, and those parts which were heard

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were too loud to be pleasant. Then for another description of listeners. They were the persons who gave unmitigated praise, and this was because they were placed about the centre of the building, in the very best part for hearing. They were neither stunned, nor did they hear an undue proportion of any one sound, to the exclusion of the entire harmony. Here, then, all praise was due, for a more glorious and astounding effect could not have been produced: but now we come to the disaffected, who were, in fact, placed at too great a distance from the orchestra. Take, for instance, the upper gallery at the furthest end, opposite the performers: no doubt, this situation is removed beyond the fair extent of the human voice. The great mistake seems to be in supposing that the sound of a large orchestra like this would be carried to a much greater distance than the sound of a small orchestra. That the noise is *louder* within the limits of a voice or instrument from a large body of executants cannot be denied; but beyond those limits the sound does not arrive at the ear at all. Surely no one would pretend that every singer in this great chorus is able to throw his or her voice to the opposite end of the building—a distance of 360 yards: these voices, then, never can reach the listener in the east gallery, and he is consequently listening, not to 2765 voices, but, in reality, to a very reduced number of singers. It must be a fallacy to suppose that a young lady or gentleman, who would not alone be heard at a given distance, would be more audible because such singers happen to be standing beside a few hundred powerful voices. The consequence must necessarily be, that the only proper portion of the building for listening to the effect of the 2765 voices must be within the limits of the weakest voices.

Another defect pointed out by a great number of persons is this:—that some sounds from the orchestra travel quicker than others, and therefore reach the ear earlier than those sounds which ought to accompany them. This defect is denied by some, who argue upon the well-known theory in acoustics, that all sounds, whether grave or acute, loud or soft, travel with equal velocity. If this be true, it is a most startling proposition. That sounds emitted by the same instrument travel with equal velocity, seems to be proved in practice; but it surely cannot be true with regard to sounds of a totally different nature. Take, for instance, the report of a rifle discharged at the same instant of time with the note of a flute,—can it be seriously contended that a listener placed at 500 yards off, or within the limits of the flute's sound, will hear the flute at the same instant that he hears the report of the rifle? What is stated with respect to the music in the Crystal Palace, is, that some sounds from the orchestra reach the ear before others. No one can doubt that this is a fact to a certain extent; but it is difficult to prove that such sounds have been emitted exactly in their proper places. The actual difference will, no doubt, be small, since it is known that sound travels through the air, under ordinary circumstances, at the rate of 1130 feet per second; but, nevertheless, an acute ear might well detect even the slightest difference in florid passages of music. Every one has observed the well-defined period of time which elapses between the beat of Mr. Costa's *bâton* and the first note of each bar, by which the rate of velocity in sound may be easily traced; and it is not difficult to imagine that the effect of the music generally will be deteriorated by any given sound in the orchestra travelling at a greater velocity than the other sounds.

We have made these observations, not with any desire to detract from the merits of the late performance, but with a view to lead scientific men to enquiry upon a subject of much interest. There have been very few buildings ever constructed that appear to fulfil all the requisites for the proper conveyance of sound, and it would be very desirable if the knowledge of acoustics were better understood. The Crystal Palace was never built with a view to perfect acoustic arrangements, and it is wonderful that the defects should not be more obvious; but one would suppose that still further alterations might be made to enable those who are placed at the extreme end to appreciate the beauties of such a Festival as we have just witnessed.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

"Piano" *should make enquiries of his music publisher, for the information he desires.*

We cannot inform our Correspondent "who Euryanthe was." One gentleman informs us he has read the story, but cannot tell where, nor what it is about; he adds that the libretto of the opera is the most rapid and worthless of its class. In a French notice of the life and works of Weber, the libretto is spoken of as cold and colourless—but, such as it is, it may be obtained in German and in French of Schott and Co., in Regent Street, should our correspondent choose to pursue the enquiry. We suspect Euryanthe to be a member of the family of the celebrated Mrs. Harris.

We cannot undertake to return offered contributions; the authors, therefore, will do well to retain copies.

We would request those who send us country newspapers, wishing us to read particular paragraphs, to mark the passage, by cutting a slip in the paper near it.

The late hour at which Advertisements reach us, interferes much with their proper classification.

Colored Envelopes *are sent to all Subscribers whose payment in advance is exhausted. The paper will be discontinued where the Subscriber neglects to renew. We again remind those who are disappointed in getting back numbers, that only the music pages are stereotyped, and of the rest of the paper, only sufficient are printed to supply the current sale.*

Notices of concerts and other information supplied by our friends in the country, must be forwarded as early as possible after the occurrence, otherwise they cannot be inserted. Our correspondents must specifically denote the date of each concert, for without such date no notice can be taken of the performance. All communications must be authenticated by the proper name and address of the writer, not necessarily for publication.

Musical Contributions.—*We take this opportunity of thanking many of our friends for their kindness in offering us musical compositions for publication, but it is right to state that it would be quite inconsistent with our arrangements to entertain any offer of this nature.*

Brief Chronicle of the last Month.

Aberdeen.—On the 24th of June, the Aberdeen Choral Society gave a concert in Albion-street Chapel, to collect funds for the new organ which has lately been erected. The programme consisted of a miscellaneous selection of sacred music, which was very correctly sung. Mr. Melvin conducted the performance, and the organ was well played by the Misses Wilson.

Bensington.—The Wallingford Amateur Choral Society gave a concert of sacred music, in the British School, to a large audience, on the 19th ult. Mozart's Twelfth Mass was well performed for the first part of the entertainment, and selections from the *Messiah*, *Judas Maccabæus*, and *Dettingen Te Deum*, for the second part. Mr. G. C. Burry, organist of St. Mary's, Wallingford, and Mr. Staniland, of Abingdon, presided at the harmonium. Mr. Brasher conducted.

Beverley.—A concert was given in the Assembly-rooms on the 12th ult., by the united choirs of the Minster and St. Mary's Church, for the benefit of the widow and children of the late Quartermaster-Sergeant Tookey. The concert was got up by the Militia band-master, under the auspices of the officers of the regiment. The solos were sung by the Misses Nun, Rose, and Winter, ladies resident in Beverley, who kindly gave their assistance, and by Messrs. Brigham, Coverdale, and Bliss. The part-songs and band-pieces were well performed.